

As Halloween nears, one Travis NCO tells how he became a...

SSgt. Bill "Drac" Edwards sculps the first in a series of signature masks he plans to have ready for sale next Halloween.



(Left), Edwards and some of the moulds he has created for his full, over-the-head latex Halloween masks. (Above), Drac, Edwards' signature caricature.

Monster Maker



Vance Swank sits by patiently as Edwards creates a form-fitting mask for him. Swank's head is covered with a layer of prosthetic-grade alginate. After it gells, Edwards will coat it with plaster to maintain its shape. Later, Swank will wiggle out of the shell after the plaster dries.

By Michael T. Moseley
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What do you do when you're six years old, hiding behind the couch watching your first "Mummy" movie, and your mother tells you that it's just a man dressed up like a monster? You go immediately to the bathroom, dig out every washrag in the linen closet, wet them down, plaster them all over your body, and build your own mummy costume. At least that's what SSgt. Bill "Drac" Edwards did in that instance. "I got a beating for it, too," Edwards said with a smile. "But she told me it was just a man dressed in rags, and they were the first rags I thought of." Since then, Edwards has been fascinated by monsters and the making of them. His desk in the 60th Air Mobility Wing safety office is decorated with pictures and masks that he has created. "Sometimes I have to do some fast explaining to visiting colonels," Edwards noted. "I tell them very quickly that I make this stuff." And make "stuff" he does. Current-

ly the American Movie Classics channel is running a special on movie monsters and the men behind the special make-up effects. The narrator and host, Forrest J. "Forry" Ackerman, is flanked by some of the most famous masks in movie history, but the mask he is holding in his hand is Edward's own creation — Eyegore. "I was so honored that he would choose to hold up my mask," said Edwards. "I know Forry well, but I was still honored that he used my mask. My mother says that my first words were 'Forry Ackerman.' I've admired his work a long time." Eyegore is just the first in a series of masks Edwards plans to create for next Halloween. "I'm creating a signature series," he said. "Each one will have my personal signature etched into the mask on the inside. I don't know of any other artist who does that." Though Edwards enjoys making generic masks that can be worn by anyone, he also specializes in making form-fitting masks, that are carefully moulded to the shape of a particular face. "First, you make a hard plastic mould of the person's face," Edwards

explained. "It takes a long time to get it just right, but from that you can make the latex mask. You can virtually create anything you like after you have the face mould. It's a lot of fun." Edwards is also called on to perform other duties that relate to his passion for monsters. He's *Scary Monster Magazine's* Official Scary Photographer. "Every year in June we have a Monster Bash in Pennsylvania," Edwards said. "It attracts a lot of Hollywood filmmakers and special make-up effects artists." Edwards has gotten to know many of the people who have made the art of monster making famous. Ackerman, considered by many to be the leading authority on movie monsters, is also the man who, as editor in chief of *Famous Monsters of Film Land* magazine, received the first story written by a young up-and-coming horror enthusiast, Stephen King. Ackerman also owns the prestigious Ackermansion, which houses many relics of movie monster past. Ben Chapman, famous for portraying the Creature from the

Black Lagoon, is not only a friend but a client of Edwards'. "I make his business cards," Edwards said. "I make cards for quite a few people. It's just another thing I like doing." Until recently, hob-nobbing with the likes of Ackerman, Chapman, Tom Savini (special make-up effects artist for the Creepshow and Friday the 13th movies) and Bob Burns (movie monster historian and collector) has just been a hobby. "When I saw Forry holding my mask on AMC, I thought, maybe I can do this for a living," Edwards said. That's when he decided to take the craft more seriously. "A lot of people sort of consider me as a good source of information on monsters and masks and things," Edwards explained. "Now, a lot of people are beginning to notice my masks." It was Edwards who helped Chapman write the forward for the new book "The Monster Club.Com Guide to Horror." Edwards has also written articles on special make-up effects, which have been featured in *Mon-*

ster News and *Scary Monster Magazine*. All in all, the future is looking up for this young man from Elnora, Ind. He's started a business called the Fright Factory Outlet. Working out of his two-room apartment in Vacaville, he plans to provide his customers with hand-made masks for next Halloween. "First, I had to find a clay that didn't have a smell to it," he said. "It's not easy working out of my little apartment." What's his favorite part when it comes to making scary masks? "Scaring people, what else?" he said with a laugh. "There's nothing like being a little kid and being really scared by that monster on TV or in the movie. You're scared, but somehow, you know it's just make-believe, it's not real. It's that combination of fear and the feeling of safety at the same time that is the greatest feeling in the world." Edwards also has a Web site where Internet users can see some of his creations. The Web address is www.geocities.com/hollywood/set/5674.



Edwards and his favorite mask — Eyegore — visit the Ackermansion, owned by Forrest J. Ackerman. Ackerman was one of the first influences for another young artist, John Landis, famous for his special movie effects.

Courtesy photos from the Fright Factory Outlet